



Focus Sheet

Agricultural Burning

Background

The way agricultural burning is managed is changing in the Northwest, with Washington State leading the way. This change is part of a comprehensive revision of the state's air pollution law that affects not just agriculture, but many other commercial, individual and governmental activities. *The Clean Air Washington Act of 1991* states that those who contribute to air pollution will share the job of protecting air quality.

Approximately 2,000 agricultural fires are set each year in Washington state to control weeds and plant diseases and to dispose of debris. Some 250,000 acres of fields, along with the collected trimmings and cuttings of many more acres, are burned annually.

An estimated 40,000 tons of pollution comes from this agricultural burning. This includes particulate matter, carbon monoxide, and volatile organic compounds. These pollutants can aggravate heart and lung disease; irritate eyes, throat, and sinuses; trigger headaches and allergies; and increase the severity of pre-existing health problems such as asthma, emphysema, pneumonia and bronchitis.

What is agricultural burning, and do I need a permit?

Agricultural burning is defined as "the burning of vegetative debris from agricultural operations necessary for disease or pest control, crop propagation, or crop rotation, or where identified as a best management practice." The Clean Air Act allows for agricultural burning, excluding grass grown for seed, when each of the following conditions are met:

- It is reasonably necessary to carry out the enterprise.
- Proper weather and air quality conditions exist.
- A permit designed to minimize air pollution to the extent practical has been obtained from the air quality agency or a delegated permitting authority.

Agricultural burn permits **are required** to burn any open fields, harvest debris, or orchard trees being taken out of production. Permits **are not** required to burn orchard prunings, natural vegetation along fencelines or irrigation and drainage ditches, and windblown tumbleweeds.

Prior to any burning, the grower must call the toll-free agricultural burn line, **800-406-5322**, to find out whether it is a burn or no-burn day, based on smoke ventilation forecasts.

Delegated permitting authorities

The Department of Ecology has delegated the authority to issue agricultural burn permits to the following agencies:

Adams	Conservation District	(509) 659-1553
Asotin	Conservation District	(509) 758-8012
Benton	Clean Air Authority	(509) 943-3396
Columbia	WSU Cooperative Extension	(509) 382-4741
Franklin	County Code Enforcement	(509) 545-3521
Garfield	Pomeroy Conservation District	(509) 843-1998
Grant	1) Upper Grant Conservation District	(509) 754-0195
	2) Warden Conservation District	(509) 349-7539
Spokane	Air Pollution Control Authority	(509) 456-4727
Walla Walla	Burn Control Office	(509) 527-3226
Whitman	1) Palouse-Rock Lake Conserv. District	(509) 648-3680
	2) Palouse Conservation District	(509) 332-4101
	3) Whitman Conservation District	(509) 397-4953
Yakima	Clean Air Authority	(509) 574-1410

In the Eastern Washington counties not listed, call:

Department of Ecology	(509) 456-2926
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Agricultural Burning Practices and Research Task Force

The Clean Air Act also established the Agricultural Burning Practices and Research Task Force. Members represent the farming community, conservation districts, the state departments of Agriculture and Ecology, local air authorities, college or university agricultural specialists, and the public health or medical community.

Best management practices (BMPs) related to agricultural burning and air quality were adopted by the task force in 1996 and must be cited as a required aspect of the agricultural burn permit. The task force with the assistance of agricultural experts and the agricultural community revised the BMPs in the spring of 1999 with the goal of reducing emissions from agricultural burning.

The task force also sets the burn permit fee, identifies research needs and recommends research funding priorities to explore and test economical and practical alternative practices to agricultural burning.

For more information

Department of Ecology, Air Quality--Olympia	(360) 407-6830
Department of Ecology, Air Quality-- Spokane	(509) 456-2926

If you require this document in alternative format, please call Tami Dahlgren at (360) 407-6830 (voice) or (360) 407-6006 (TDD only).